

The European Academy of Neurology is 6 years old: challenges, opportunities and strategic priorities for the future

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Before the European Academy of Neurology: the roots

The first international Neurological Congress took place in Bern, Switzerland, in 1931 with the participation of 42 countries from four continents [1]. The World Federation of Neurology was founded in 1957, whereas the European Neurological Society (ENS) (1986) and the European Federation of Neurological Societies (EFNS) (1991) came much later [2].

The first ideas of bringing European societies together appeared in the late 1990s, but concretized only in 2011, when a formal agreement between the ENS and the EFNS was signed [3]. A task force composed of Prof. G. Moonen, Prof. J. Ferro and Prof. C. Bassetti from the ENS, and Prof. J. De Reuck, Prof. D. Kömpf and Prof. G. Waldemar from the EFNS created the basis for the new society [2].

European Academy of Neurology 2014–2019: foundation and growth

The birth of the European Academy of Neurology (EAN) took place in Istanbul in 2014, on the occasion of the last (and joint) meeting of the ENS and EFNS. During that meeting the first EAN board was elected (Fig. 1). Under the visionary and energetic guidance

of the first two presidents, Prof. Günther Deuschl (2014–2018) and Prof. Franz Fazekas (2018–2020), the EAN has grown fast and efficiently ushering in the vision of being the home of neurology with the mission of reducing the burden of neurological disorders in Europe.

In 2020 the EAN includes 47 European national societies, 11 extra-European corresponding national societies, 2251 full members and over 45 000 individual members. The number of residents and research fellows has been growing fast (>1400 at present), assuring the important input of the new generations in preparing the future of neurology.

Collaborations between national societies were made possible by the national delegates and a number of activities such as EAN days, regional teaching courses and spring and summer schools, which took place in European, as well as African and Arabic, countries.

Five annual congresses in Berlin (2015), Copenhagen (2016), Amsterdam (2017), Lisbon (2018) and Oslo (2019) were organized with an increasing success in terms of number of participants [from 6300 in 2015 to 6916 in 2019 (+10%)], abstracts [from 1966 to 2500 (+27%)], congress bursaries [from 486 to 682 (+40%)] and industry partners. Over the years the EAN administration has successfully taken over the entire organization of the annual congress.



Figure 1 The first European Academy of Neurology (EAN) board. Front row: Prof. Fanz Fazekas (EAN President 2018–2020), Prof. Hanna Cock, Prof. Günther Deuschl (EAN President 2014–2018), Prof. Paul Boon and Prof. David Vodusek. Back row: Prof. Antonio Federico, Prof. Per Soelberg Soerensen, Prof. Didier Leys and Prof. Marianne de Visser.

Research and the dissemination of its results have been promoted by 30 EAN Scientific Panels that include a growing working force [from 1099 members in 2015 to 2000 in 2020 (+82%)] representing all sub-disciplines of neurology. Their input was essential for an increasing number of guidelines (104 at present), which changed rapidly to GRADE methodology [4].

Science and education are also promoted with our partner societies and Prof. Didier Leys was recently appointed as the new editor-in-chief of the *European Journal of Neurology*, the official journal of the EAN.

European Academy of Neurology 2019–2020: unexpected tremendous challenges

This last year will be remembered as an ‘annus horribilis’ for the EAN. In May 2019, our President suffered a severe disease, from which he is fortunately recovering well. In late January 2020, the COVID-19 outbreak developed in Europe causing over 170 000 deaths and an exceptional medical, emotional and economic burden for the entire population.

Difficult times ask for innovative and courageous solutions, which may open new opportunities for the future. The EAN decided to cancel the face-to-face meeting in Paris and to organize a virtual meeting. The response of the community has been very positive with over 42 000 registrations including so far (24 May 2020), including a high number of residents and students from outside Europe. A COVID-19 initiative was also rapidly started, including an online survey, a registry on neurological complications (launched on April 29, with over 220 centers participating until June 2, 2020), a platform for rapid literature alert and consultations, and a call for international collaborations [5].

European Academy of Neurology: challenges, opportunities and strategic priorities for 2020–2024

In the last three decades, incredible advances have been made in the diagnostic and treatment options (including gene therapy) of patients with stroke, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson, epilepsy, headache, neuromuscular and other disorders. Nevertheless, the overall burden of neurological disorders has increased over the last 30 years with the aging population [6]. At present, between one in three and one in six people have a neurological problem, some of which (e.g. amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Alzheimer’s disease) remain untreatable. Neurology also faces many other challenges, such as an insufficient number of neurologists (in some health systems in Europe, neurological diseases are managed by non-specialists), increasing subspecialization (at the

cost of general neurology) and insufficient involvement in such fields as intensive care, sleep, pain, geriatrics and palliative care [7]. Other challenges include the limited funding for neurological research, insufficient number of women in academia and increasing financial burden on our healthcare systems. Fortunately, technological advancements such as genetics, epigenetics and omics approaches, high-resolution neuroimaging, digital medicine, telemedicine and brain–machine interface offer promising new opportunities.

To best realize its vision and mission, the EAN recently identified four strategic priorities (and corresponding actions) for the near future.

- 1) Science. Promote clinical scientist curricula; organize schools on translational approaches and scientific topics of general interest; and advocate at European levels for more funding for neurological research.
- 2) Education. Maintain the skills for a solid semiological approach; guarantee a good balance between subspecialties and general neurology [8]; foster the careers of educators; harmonize pre- and postgraduate neurology training across Europe; promote interdisciplinarity (e.g. common trunk training) with neighboring disciplines (neurosurgery, neuroradiology, neuropsychiatry, psychiatry); and create a comprehensive E-learning platform.
- 3) Membership. Establish mentorship, leadership and equal opportunities programs; promote interprofessional cooperations; attract highly qualified students and empower residents and research fellows.
- 4) Advocacy. Foster the involvement of patients and caregivers in moving from a disease- and profit-centered delivery of care to a patient- and quality-centered delivery of care; increase awareness among the lay public, healthcare providers as well as law and policymakers of the burden and cost of neurological disorders as well as the benefits garnered from neurology; and strengthen the collaboration with international and national neurological and health associations.

In 1953, in his lecture on ‘The future of clinical neurology’ in homage to Ramon y Cajal, Sir Russell Brain stated that ‘the need for the clinical neurologist in the ordinary practice of medicine has never been so great as it is today’ [9]. This statement has maintained its validity even today and the EAN will continue to promote a bright future for neurology.

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